

A GROUP OF VAGOBONDS

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but I ventured to affirm that I would n't try to control an inclination to knock his head off, if he repeated his carelessness. That sobered him.

He hung on to me this time till I was ready; and when I gave the command, he let go, and I bore down on the old gentleman and the young lady. They were pretty close to me, and there was but little distance to "bore," which was just as well. Came up before them, scraping the ice with vigor.

"Learning to skate?" I asked, moving about to keep on my feet.

"Yes, sir," she said.

"Why don't you try it alone?" — I asked; "that is the way I learned."

"Aint it hard?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Not at all," said I, continuing to move about to avoid falling over both of them.

"Just look at me now, and see how I do it, and then you try the same way," I added, placing my back to them, and preparing to do something to take away their breath.

"Are you looking?" I said with confidence, but not daring to turn around.

"O, yes!" they both cried.

"Then here I go," I said. The words were no sooner uttered than verified. I felt a sudden, rapid movement. I heard a rasping sound beneath me and then right ahead. The lights gave a sudden whirl and disappeared, and the next minute I struck the ice a tremendous blow with the back of my head. I never had aught interest me like that. It had absorbed all my attention. I was confident nobody ever had such a fall. Not even our first parents; nor the Niagara river. It was worse than last fall. This consoled me. I made no inquiries for the young lady. I told the boy to come and unharness me. There was not variety enough about skating to suit me. Besides, the owner of the pond was a poor man, and had a large family, and this was his only pond.

FROM OUR FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT.

A GROUP OF VAGABONDS.

A FRENCH VILLAGE SKETCH.

IN the quiet of the village, amidst rural scenes, we have a multitude of characters passing in continual procession before us. Of the various species of itinerancy that appear to teach us their lesson, and in a few moments move on again, the peddlers suggest only the unpoetic doctrine of demand and supply. We hearken a moment to their strange cries, and note the kind of goods they have to offer, and then forget them as they disappear, and their shrill cries die away in distance. By far the larger portion of these wanderers are traveling musicians, whom the sober village people very generally regard as beggars and nuisances. Unlike the peddlers, they smack of the genuine flavor of romantic oddness, for they represent supply without regard to de-

"Why, what on earth did you do that for?" he asked, looking at me with considerable uneasiness, and holding his hand on his head.

I did n't make any answer. I saw I had created a sensation. Besides, my head ached. He helped me up, but I noticed he did not show the enthusiasm he brought to the first effort, and, also, that when he got me to a perpendicular, he showed an inclination to avoid me. One eye he kept on me, and the other revolved toward the shore. This angered me.

"I won't hurt you," said I.

"I don't want you to," he answered.

"Why don't you stay by me then?" I asked.

"Because I aint got much hair, and aint old enough to wear a wig."

Useless it was to argue with him, and, besides, the skates were acting a little uneasy. My knees were wobbling back and forth with increasing speed, and I did n't know but they would become unhinged.

"But what are you trying to do now? — take yourself apart?" he asked.

This query exhausted my patience. I braced my knees up and moved off. I was again very ruffled; and felt very damp where I did n't want to. The owner of the skates was pleased with this movement, but not quite so intoxicated with delight as to forget all his caution. I moved off about two yards, then brought up so quick as to wrench my back, but kept on my feet. However, that cramp in the back troubled me, and I concluded if I had to crack my spine whenever I stopped, I would not stop again. Got along very well for a couple of rods, as the ice was cut up here. Then sat down to rest. Did not really intend to rest there; but, as I sat down, thought I might as well rest. Like many amateurs, I was careless in my sitting place, otherwise I would have gone an inch further, and avoided a small paving stone. Felt contented here; there did n't appear to be any danger. The proprietor of the skates did n't share my satisfaction, however.

"Aint you goin' any farther?" he asked.

"Not yet," I said.

"But suppose it comes on to thaw?"

Could n't answer this, and did n't want to. A little ahead of us was an old gentleman and a young lady. The young lady was on skates, and the old gentleman was helping her along. The young lady was very handsome, and I became interested in her progress; concluded to help her.

"Come here, Mr. Hinckley, and do help me up again," said I to the boy.

"My name aint Hinckley, though I don't know what it is, my head is so sore," he said, as he pulled me on of my feet. I had him hold me while I straightened my neck-tie, and then I told him to let go when I said "ready." Laid back for a stunning movement, and opened my mouth to give the signal, when he abruptly let go. I made an effort to catch myself, but it was abortive. I came down with force sufficient to split the pond wide open, and to send the damp part of my pants up into my throat. The young man made all haste to get me up again. He was really frightened; he said, "I would n't do that again, if I was you."

I assured him I would try my best to suppress any desire to do it again

mand ; and the town idlers (ourselves in the number), somewhat in the spirit of chivalry, love to patronize these neglected children of genius. To us they are relics of chivalry. They are the inspired children of song who sang here of love and heroism in the Middle Ages. Now that times are changed, these nurslings of *Musica*, themselves unchanged, wander without appreciation about a world that no longer cares for their humble songs ; for heroic deeds are now become the trade of a few, and hides and stocks do not admit of rhythm, nor do figures flow to music. The artists that we patronize are hungry and ragged ghosts of the minstrels and troubadours who yet linger about their old haunts, and flit to and fro like disconsolate spirits, fainting for a breath of the chivalric breezes that cheered them so in years agone.

THE MINSTREL.

Let me draw his portrait as he stands beneath our window, for he has fallen with great exactness into an attitude of melting grace. His skin is dark ; the whiskers that adorn the sides of his face are of a dashy cut, and the seedy tone of the rest of his face indicates that the time for his regular Sunday shave is at hand. His hair is long and unkempt, and amply powdered with the dust of the road, and his head is surmounted by a greasy and dusty cap. As he throws back his head to sing, his eyes, which, without doubt, are very impressive, are concealed behind immense blue goggles, and his open mouth reveals a black gorge back of gums which are toothless, except two dark tusks on one side of the upper jaw. He is tall and slender, and a glance at his graceful figure shows that his long legs are of the dimensions of pipe-stems ; his feet are large and flat, and he is decidedly knock-kneed. His dress is shabby-genteel, with a marked preponderance towards the shabby. His attitude is the one assumed by all who play the guitar. He stands on his right foot with the left thrown forward, with body erect and head thrown back. His eyes are looking dreamily upward with all the artistic indifference that the best of his craft can assume when he would seem to behold airy visions to the exclusion of more material things. The ribbon which passes over his shoulder to support his guitar is green, except the two ends fastened to the instrument, which are brown with handling.

The minstrel, who appeared to be about thirty-five years of age, was accompanied by two small bareheaded girls, who by turns quarreled together, and sang, with sweet, childish voices, "Gaily the Troubadour touched his Guitar." Our friend was one of the gayest. He sang melting love songs to his instrument with remarkable facial expression. As it was a warm day, all the blinds were closed, and his only visible auditor was a small boy with red hair, who gazed soberly at him with a puzzled expression of countenance. The minstrel finally began an amatory song of the extremest kind, with a merry recitative between the verses. The expression of his face was really agonizing. He looked whole volumes of romantic love in the softest parts, and when the other sentiment came in, he broke into loud, chattering laughter. The effect of all this sentiment and jollity upon his countenance was so ridiculous, or sickening, that the boy with the red hair looked into his face with

profound wonderment, or spread his freckled face into a broad, sympathetic grin at the contortions. As near as we could judge, the boy was trying to think what it was that tickled the man so much. He tried to see what he was looking at, and followed the line of his eyes ; but not seeing anything funny, he would look puzzled for a moment, and then his face would crack again into a doubtful, sickly smile. The man sang for a long time, and he was so merry withal, that we were ready to pronounce him the jolliest beggar that the world had known. A sou dropped from a window when he was in the midst of one of his jolliest recitatives. He stopped abruptly in his verse and raised his cap to express his gratitude, and his face was extremely serious, as it was at all times, except when singing. In short, he was a merry beggar by trade only ; and, as I have heard said of comic actors and circus clowns, when off duty, he was serious even to sourness. The earnest gratitude that shone in the poor fellow's face at the gift of a single sou was enough to move the dull-est comprehension to an appreciation of the precariousness of the modern profession of minstrelsy.

THE ACCORDEON PLAYER.

The notes of an accordeon, softened in the quiet air, were borne up the village street, and in at our window, for some time before the musicians came in sight. At last, they came up the hill tugging side by side at a small cart, the man pulling by a strap over his shoulder, and playing the accordeon at the same time, and his wife holding one of the shafts. A little girl, three or four years of age, ran about them, or, with the artlessness of childhood solicited alms ; and a second child, apparently of about the same age, slept in the wagon on some blankets thrown upon the bottom. In the corners of the cart were one or two bottles and a few plates, and in a net bag hanging to one of the rude shafts was a kettle, blackened and sooty with use. All of the family were poorly dressed, and their clothes were much stained with dust and travel. The man was fair and well-looking, but totally blind. The woman's face, though much burned, was open and honest ; and the little one, with pretty, rosy cheeks, and barefooted, ran about with childish freedom, appearing not to entertain a doubt but that the occupation of her parents was the most respectable one in the world.

As was usual, when the people seemed deserving there were several who threw money to them, and it was sufficient recompense to see the humble gratitude that shone in the woman's face as she returned thanks ; while the sweet little voice of the child in her "*merci bien*," might well inspire a fresh donation. To a lady, whom their simple honesty, no less than their miserable poverty, had caused to feel an interest in them, the woman explained that the child in the wagon was sick, and that besides that, they had to buy medicine for it, at the same time showing a bottle of medicine which had cost half a franc. The lady gave them various articles of clothing for the sick child, for which it seemed the pleased mother could not be sufficiently grateful. She greeted the gift with "*Ma bonne foi !*" and the giver as "*Ma bonne mère !*" with repeated thanks, and she spread the things fondly over her sleeping

child. She looked repeatedly up at the window to catch the eye of her benefactress, and bowed again and again in expression of the gratitude that was overflowing in the mother's heart.

In arranging the bed, the little sleeper was aroused, and manifested all the sleepy unconcern that characterizes less public slumber. The man passed the strap over his chest and resumed his accordeon; the woman seized one of the shafts, and with the little barefoot trotting in the rear, gazing to right and left in wonder at the magnitude and strangeness of the world, her unheeding feet stumbling on the rough pavement, they all disappeared around a bend in the street, carrying their poverty and their misery with them. They had themselves absorbed a little good, and they left behind, in a few of the houses, some of the fragrance that exhales from a good deed.

THE ORGAN-GRINDER.

An old gray-haired man, with a countenance that looks like parchment drawn over a bare skull, and a woman with a face withered and puckered like a squirrel's. The old organ which they drag about on a small carriage has seen the suns and storms of many years, and the ancient tunes, like faithful servitors, still limp on, following the waning fortunes of their master.

They stop to play beneath our window. Such a strange medley of sounds ! Sometimes they are tender and soft, stealing with all sweetness on the ear, and anon, they tell in sad, plaintive voices, of long life and many sorrows. The soul is melting with sympathy when the old man essays another and more joyous strain. It is like looking into his own dim eye to see the fire and grace of his youth. The new set of notes comes forth weighed down with the burden of years. Harsh, choking, and wheezing sounds skip forth from the asthmatic little box. We hear sounds as of spirits in torment ; sighings, groanings, wailings, some long drawn and others cut short. Now the sounds seem unable to leave the box, and to writhe like a bunch of snakes. Now there is a smothered rattling of bones, as the dry skeletons of once rich melodies are stirred and shaken about. Sometimes they exclaim testily, or shriek wildly, as they attempt to drag their brittle and rheumatic limbs through the airy motions required of them.

Two small boxes holding their personal effects, strapped on either side of the organ, indicate that night overtakes them everywhere at home ; and the gaunt old dog that helps them draw the carriage, and sits so patiently, during the frequent stops, seems the last of all the world that pertains to them. What a strange, mournful life they lead, they three together, earning the bread for so many successive meals before it can be eaten ; toiling, sorrowing, but seldom rejoicing, waiting patiently the fulness of years that is to change a sorrow-laden life for an existence which, they vaguely believe, must be an accumulation of all the blessings that are now denied them.

We always gave to these poor people. Whatever may have been their faults, they see little enough of the joyousness of life, and a few sous spent to smoothe the downward pathway of a fellow-being is never misapplied.

Indeed, E—— went so far as to assert that no one owns the money in his pocket when another is suffering by his side.

THE PIPER.

One day, a new and strange couple of vagrants passed through the village. An old blind piper, poorly clad, wearing wooden shoes, was led by a string fastened to his arm and to the collar of a large white dog. His companion was an old woman whose eyes were diseased, and almost sightless. The old man played with wondrous skill. The clear, strong tones, pure and liquid, floated in the air for a long time before he came in sight, and after he had passed from view. The music alone was enough to melt the heart to giving, and it was the sweeter for the pity that the heart felt for his misfortunes. A strange old couple. To the one all the brightness, all the good of the world, was in the sympathetic tones and touch of his two companions, and in the soul-solace which he so skilfully summoned from his pipe. The bright sun, which was but blackness and gloom in his own dead eyes, only pained and dazzled the sight of his wife. She could with difficulty find the coins that were thrown to the ground for her. When she turned her thankful, red, decaying eyes to our faces with her "*merci bien*," she pointed to her own infirmity, and as the light sent the pain flashing across the vision, she immediately covered her eyes again with her handkerchief.

The man stood motionless behind his great, shaggy, kind old dog, and played without intermission. The teacher of the parish school sent one of her smallest children with a contribution for the wooden bowl which the dog held in his mouth. The little thing ran with all her speed to do the errand, and having dropped the money, hesitated for a moment in embarrassment, when the kind old beggar-woman took her hand and laid it on the thick matted hair of the dog's head. The child enjoyed the touch for a moment, and then bashfully scampered back again.

Surely, thought we, when they had passed on in their never-ending journey beneath a midnight gloom, the world is much more than seems to us. How much we might see that is truly soul-stirring if we did not so resolutely shut our eyes to it! How much Christian charity there might be in the world, how much misery might be prevented, only by bestowing in charity the little that is now withheld from fear of encouraging impostors!

CHARLES A. LEWIS.

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